



Starting Safe Delivery: Lt. Gov. Dick Posthumus (second from left) joined state Sen. Shirley Johnson (left), state Rep. Patricia Birkholz and FIA director Douglas E. Howard to kick off the new Safe Delivery law and service program in January.

Safe Delivery started Jan. 1

New state law provides for legal surrender of newborns within 72 hours of birth

LANSING—Lt. Gov. Dick Posthumus joined lawmakers, officials and emergency service providers Jan. 8 to announce Michigan's new Safe Delivery of Newborns law. The kickoff was held at Ingham Regional Medical Center, a facility that could serve newborns under the law. David Eich, chief marketing officer for Ingham Regional Medical Center, hosted the gathering.

The Safe Delivery law went into effect Jan. 1. It enables a parent to surrender a newborn in a safe and anonymous manner. The newborn, up to 72 hours old, must be taken to a hospital, police or fire department and turned over to a uniformed officer or identifiable employee.

Michigan is the 29th state to implement such a law.

"We want to ensure the safety of newborns," Posthumus said. "This provides parents in crisis with an alternative to abandoning their child in an unsafe place."

Other speakers were Douglas E. Howard, director of the Family Independence Agency, James K. Haveman, director of the Michigan Department of Community Health, state Sen. Shirley Johnson of Royal Oak, state Rep. Patricia Birkholz of Saugatuck and representatives from various emergency service providers. The event represented a collaboration of state and local service agencies.

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FIA Icon for February-March 2001

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Intercepted letters

From: Shari Caffrey, FIA Zone 2 office, Traverse City
To: Roger Quinn, FIA Zone 2 office
Subj: Heartwarming experience

Since you do not get to experience these precious moments we are privileged to share with some of our children, I thought you would enjoy these glimpses of adoption through this six-year-old's eyes. As you know this week six-year-old Mary is in her first week of visiting with her new adopting family. After two evening visits at her foster home, she spent an afternoon and evening with her new family. These are some of her experiences through her eyes: When her new mom and dad inquired as to what she would like them to call her, either her first name or her nickname, she thought for a moment and replied, "For now, you can call me Mary, but when I move in with you, you can call me your daughter." After a few more minutes passed she added, "And grandma and grandpa can call me their granddaughter." Later in the afternoon, as she was walking through a grocery store with her new sister, she was hugging her tightly and announcing excitedly to everyone that passed by her, "This is my new big sister", a lady looked at her sister and asked, "Adoption?" Mary quickly replied, "Not yet, but soon." That same afternoon, as Mary prepared to make cookies with her new mom, mom put one of her aprons on Mary. Mary then asked, "Have you been saving this forever and ever, just for me?" Mary's new mom also went to her classroom the following day to help make gingerbread houses with Mary. Mom said the grade school children were nearly as excited as Mary and mom said she felt as if she were a celebrity. The children are all very excited for Mary and the fact that she is getting a new, forever family.

Note: Mary is not the child's real name, which was changed to protect confidentiality.

From: Chuck Jones, director, FIA Reengineering and Quality Management
To: FIA Office of Communications
Subj: Food stamp accuracy

Our food stamp accuracy rate for August 2000 was 8.01 percent, the lowest it has been since we began our efforts. Some of the things that may be contributing to it are the 24 food stamp conferences that we held last year, the Big 14 monthly meetings, local office payment accuracy plans, and a major focus on food stamp accuracy. Our monthly error rates for FY 2000 are: Oct.- 13.44; Nov- 13.60; Dec- 13.68; Jan- 14.38; Feb-12.07; Mar-12.22; Apr-11.40; May-9.35; Jun-10.89; Jul-13.15; Aug-8.01; September 12.35. The FY 2000 year-to-date rate of 12.12 percent represents the total Michigan will be assessed against. This is still preliminary until we get the final from the U. S. Food and Nutrition Service. Our year-to-date rate for FY 99 was 17.59 percent so we have had a significant reduction. We need to be at the national average (yet to be determined) for FY 2001 in order to avoid further sanctions. We dropped by over 5 percent for FY 2000 and we will need another 4-5 percent drop for 2001.

From: Jim Nye, director, FIA Oustate Operations
To: FIA Office of Communications
Subj: Food stamp accuracy

Additional activities leading to our success: We provided separate food stamp training conferences for family independence managers to specifically focus on management issues and strategies to decrease the mispayment rate. The Technical Assistance Teams continued in both Wayne and outstate counties. They have read and corrected thousands of cases, developed a targeted case reading form and desk aids for staff, and provided training in error-prone areas. We continued to require food stamp case reading and reporting so we can monitor trends and successful strategies.



FIA Icon

*a publication of Michigan's
Family Independence Agency*

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From the Director

By Douglas E. Howard

Director, Family Independence Agency

Telling our story our way

Everyone in our agency knows we work in a tough business that doesn't offer many public rewards. For every news story like the one appearing on the front page of this newsletter—the new Safe Delivery program—there are countless others about the tragedies that occur to people who come into contact with our agency. A series of stories in a Detroit newspaper last December pointed out one that resulted in the death of a little girl in Port Huron last year.

As part of my response to those stories I pledged to help do more to magnify the good work done in our agency. That brought a lot of responses from employees. Here is an example of emails I received on the topic from Diane Prisby, an adoption specialist with Ottawa County Family Independence Agency.

"I just finished reading the editorial letter that you sent to the Detroit Free Press. I am an adoption specialist in Ottawa County. I have been in this position for the past three years. Prior to this position I was a foster care worker for almost six years. I have a total of 16 and one-half years with the state.

"I truly appreciate the comments you made praising the hard work and dedication of FIA workers. It appears you have a very good understanding of the stresses we workers face on a daily basis and the overwhelming responsibilities that we have in our jobs. It is so very true that our good work is never publicized and it is because of confidentiality but somehow we need to get some facts to the public about all the good that we accomplish.

"About a month ago I picked up a baby from a foster home and brought him to our office to give him to his new adoptive mother. The baby was sitting in a car seat in my cubicle and many staff members crowded around to see him and ask about him. Everyone was elated that this child was going to a new home and that a childless couple was realizing a dream.

"It was so rewarding to see the smiles of staff and the genuine joy that they had for everyone involved including sadness for the biological mother. These are moments that the public needs to be aware of. Thank you again for your support, for your concern and for all the hard work that you do."

It is always a special experience for me to read messages like Diane's and that from Shari Caffrey in Traverse City, the one appearing on page 2 of this newsletter. We are bound by state laws that we never disclose confidential case information—or even the existence of a case—and because of that we all struggle with appropriate and legal ways to make public the successes that take place in our system, helped by our employees.

One way we can do this is through this newsletter, a medium that provides the platform to celebrate our successes. If you have a success story you want to talk about, bring it to the attention of the Office of Communications, whose staff will work with you on ways to appropriately and legally disclose the information you have to offer.

Just as Diane Prisby was elated at the people who came by to visit that infant in her office, I think you will be surprised at how much people in our system want to hear about your successes. Speaking frankly, there is a limited amount we can do to change the outlook of major media outlets in the state, but there is a lot we can do to share our stories with each other. This newsletter is one place to do that. I hope you will consider that if you have a great story to tell.

Single mom of five is final achiever for 2000

Frankfort resident Kim Noah is 85th Achiever of the Month

By Egan McGlynn Cypher, Project Zero Coordinator
Benzie-Leelanau County Family Independence Agency
Telephone (231) 882-1311

BEULAH, Mich.—Kim Noah, a single mother of five, was honored as the Family Independence Agency's statewide Achiever of the Month during ceremonies Dec. 15 in this northern Michigan city.

Many friends, family members, FIA staff and community partners were on hand to celebrate Kim's achievement. FIA officials on-hand included Family Independence Agency deputy director Mark Jasonowicz and Leelanau-Benzie County FIA director Mary Marois.

"I am very excited to be in Benzie County today," said Jasonowicz. "I want to thank all of you for joining me today to celebrate with December's Achiever of the Month.

"I have the privilege of recognizing Kimberly Noah of Beulah. Kimberly is the 85th recipient of the Achiever of the Month Award. Today, she is being honored for her determined and intense pursuit of independence from the welfare system."

Kim first turned to the Family Independence Agency for assistance in March 1995. She moved to Frankfort in Benzie County in 1998. Kim—who was encouraged by her brother and sister in law to relocate—was in a domestic violent relationship and needed to provide a safe home for her children, ages 6 to 17.

Kim found tremendous support and assistance from her family advocate, Gail Nelson at the Benzie County FIA. Kim was medically deferred from work when her case was transferred from Wayne County, but enthusiastically



Kimberly Noah

agreed to attend the first session of the "Personal Enrichment and Growth" workshop that is a coordinated effort between Benzie, Leelanau, Grand Traverse, Antrim and Kalkaska counties.

The workshop began April 3 at 9 a. m. and classes ended at 3 p.m. each day for two weeks. The workshop was held in Traverse City. Without a vehicle, Kim was expected to ride a bus from Frankfort. In order to arrive on time, she needed to get on the bus at 6 a. m. and often didn't return home until 7 p. m. in the evening.

While this transportation arrangement was challenging for Kim, she made a commitment to attend every day and make the most of her experience. Her children, especially her oldest, were helpful in taking charge of some of the household needs during this time.

Kim graduated from the "PEG" classes April 14 and, within a few weeks, her doctor released her

for work. The workshop experience helped to prepare Kim for this moment and she embraced the opportunity to develop employment goals that would improve her life and the lives of her children. Her self-esteem had improved and she was ripe to make positive changes with the help of her family, her church and her community.

Kim attended Work First orientation, met with the Michigan Works! Agency staff and, with the help of the Work First specialist, obtained a job offer on her first attempt at dropping off an application and resume. Before she knew it, she had a job working about 25 hours per week as a baker at the Blarney Castle Frankfort E-Z Mart.

The job was perfect for Kim because she could walk to work. Her employer was happy to provide an opportunity for Kim as she has done for many single mothers struggling to get on their feet.

But Kim wasn't satisfied with part-time work. She wanted to improve her skills so she could enhance her hourly wage. After six months at E-Z Mart, Kim began looking for more lucrative opportunities.

She sought a position that would provide training and would make her more employable and increase her hourly wage. Kim knew that in order to expand her opportunities, she would need reliable transportation.

During the first few months of Kim's job at E-Z Mart there were many challenges she faced as the sole provider and parent. Kim's

family advocate suggested that she enroll in a local mentoring program as a way to transition to the new “working” lifestyle while continuing to pursue family and personal goals that would be critical to her success.

The Mentor Program, coordinated by Lutheran Child and Family Service, usually identifies teams of volunteers to work with families. In Kim’s case, the perfect match for her was Chris Probst, who coincidentally was the receptionist for Lutheran Child and Family Service.

For Kim, Chris was a light at the end of a very challenging tunnel and the two quickly became friends. Chris helped keep Kim’s focus on her primary goals such as finding better housing, cleaning up her driving record in order to obtain her license, and assisting the children in coping

with their mother’s new “working” schedule.

By December 2000, Kim was included in the Project Zero “count” that indicated Benzie County, along with its partner, Leelanau County, had achieved two years at the zero benchmark—meaning all able-bodied welfare recipients had obtained and maintained employment consistently for two years.

Kim had not only obtained a job at E-Z Mart she successfully secured a better job at Moore’s Assisted Living, making more money and successfully closing her Family Independence Program case. She was able to complete the training for the new position and not only secured her driver’s license, but with the help of the Michigan Works Agency, purchased a vehicle, which was

required for the new position.

“I am pleased to have this opportunity to thank the Benzie County FIA, the Michigan Works! Agency, Kimberly’s former employer E-Z Mart and her current employer, Moore’s Assisted Living, and the many family and friends who have contributed to her climb toward economic independence and self-sufficiency,” said Jasonowicz.

Many individuals came to the celebration to honor Kim and applaud her dedication and perseverance. Her pastor was present and gave a wonderful speech along with both her former employer and her current employer. Both Gail Nelson and her Michigan Works Agency case manager, Bonnie Warren, praised Kim’s tenacity and dedication to her path for success.

Located in Traverse City and serving 10 counties, Northwest Michigan Council of Governments is the Michigan Works! Agency serving both Benzie and Leelanau counties.

To close the official event, Jasonowicz presented Kim with a plaque acknowledging Kim’s success along with a gift certificate for being the December Achiever of the Month.

“The achiever ceremony is important because it involves special people like Kimberly with FIA staff so they can see that what they do, does make a difference,” said Jasonowicz. “In the face of so many challenges it is sometimes difficult not to give way to cynicism. It is good for our staff to be around, and hear about one of our customers whose story is so inspiring.”

Congratulations Kim on your many achievements for you and your family!



Kim Noah was determined not to make public assistance a legacy for her five children (pictured here clockwise from upper right) Carl, age 17; Timothy, age 6; Jalise, age 10; Thomas, 13; and James, 11.



Safe Delivery started Jan. 1 continued from page 1

Under the law, a parent's surrender of a baby is treated as an "affirmative defense" and charges would not be filed, provided there are no signs of child abuse or neglect.

"It is my hope that this law will help us save the lives of children," said Birkholz, who with Johnson and others championed the legislation in Michigan. "If even one baby is saved, all of our work will have been worthwhile."

The legislation was spurred by several high-profile abandonments in Michigan—one at a car wash, another on church steps and a third in a high school wastebasket.

Posthumus said abandonment of newborns was previously a felony punishable by up to 10 years in prison.

Under the new law, a parent can leave the child within 72 hours of birth with an emergency service worker without criminal prosecution. "If they change their mind for any reason, they have 28 days to petition a family court to regain custody," said Posthumus.

Unless there is evidence of abuse or neglect, state child protective services units will not become involved in the legal abandonment.

While no records are kept of abandoned newborn children, Johnson estimated there were 7 or 8 such cases in Michigan last year. She cited

a report published by the Chicago Tribune that said 57 babies are abandoned daily in the U. S.

"This is a viable alternative for mothers who are in crisis situa-

gency service providers under the new law go to preapproved adoptive homes after the 28-day period, when the birth mother's parental rights are legally terminated. The program is

supported by a half-million dollar publicity campaign, said officials.

"Safe Delivery will not only ensure that child's safety, but will quickly move the infant to the loving arms of an adoptive family," Howard said. "We are in the process of distributing 200,000 brochures explaining the law to personnel at hospitals, police departments, fire departments, and public and private high schools."

Other

Safe Delivery partners at the event included representatives from Michigan Department of Education, Michigan Federation of Private Child and Family Agencies, State Fire Marshall Division, Michigan Health and Hospital Association, Michigan Sheriff's Association, Michigan Association of Chiefs of Police, Michigan State Police and the Prosecuting Attorneys Association of Michigan.

■ Information and relevant forms can be accessed at the FIA Internet website: www.mfia.state.mi.us



This brochure was circulated to schools, emergency providers and other agencies that may come into contact with pregnant teens.

tions and feel that abandoning their baby is the only option," said Johnson. "Options such as adoption are in place, but parents still abandon their newborns every day in an effort to hide the childbirth."

One aspect of the new law is a toll-free telephone line anyone can call anytime for help or assistance.

"Trained crisis counselors are available 24 hours, seven days and will treat parents with compassion, respect and dignity," Haveman said.

Newborns taken to emer-

Safe Delivery Program Fact Sheet

Effective January 1, 2001

Why a new law?

To end the tragedy of unwanted newborns being hidden and left to die in dumpsters and elsewhere, Michigan lawmakers have passed a law to make it legal for a parent to surrender their infant in a safe and anonymous manner.

What the new law provides

Unharmed newborns up to 72 hours old can be taken to an emergency service provider (**hereafter referred to as ESP**) meaning a uniformed or otherwise identified employee of a fire department, hospital or police station that is inside the building and on duty. The parent has the choice to leave the infant without giving any identifying information to the ESP. The ESP is authorized to accept the infant and provide whatever care may be necessary. The ESP will make a reasonable effort to provide the parent with the following information:

- A written statement of the parent's rights following surrender of the infant.
- Information about other confidential infant placement options, as well as information about the availability of confidential medical and counseling services, e.g., Public Health, Community Mental Health, family planning clinics, adoption agencies.

What are the rights of the surrendering parent?

- The surrendering parent has the right to be informed that by surrendering the newborn, the parent is releasing the newborn to a child-placing agency to be placed for adoption.
- The parent has 28 days to petition the court to regain custody of the newborn.
- Any information the parent provides the ESP will not be made public.
- A criminal investigation shall not be initiated solely on the basis of a newborn being surrendered to an ESP.

What happens to the baby?

- After the child's medical status is assessed and any urgent medical needs are met, the newborn is placed under the temporary custody of the court in an approved preadoptive family.
- After the 28-day period for the parent to petition the court for custody elapses, there will be a public hearing to terminate parental rights.
- There will be a public notice of this hearing, and the notice will not contain the parent's name, even if known.
- The parent will not receive personal notice of this hearing, even if the parent has provided a name and address to the ESP.
- The infant will be placed for adoption as soon as parental rights have been legally terminated.

Can the parent provide background information?

Yes, definitely. The ESP will make a reasonable attempt to offer the parent the opportunity to:

- Identify herself/himself and the other parent.
- Provide information about prenatal care.
- Provide family medical history and any history of parental substance abuse.
- To sign a release of parental rights.
- Receive information about confidential medical care the parent may need.

Does this law encourage parental irresponsibility?

There is no evidence from other states that the presence of such laws encourage abandonment.

The purpose of this law is to reduce the tragic loss of life when parents of newborns react out of fear and panic.

For more information call toll-free 1-866-733-7733

- This document is available as FIA-Pub 867.

State sets new adoption record

FIA helps 2,775 children move into adoptive homes in fiscal year 2000

Gov. John Engler said Feb. 6 the FIA and contractual adoption agencies helped 2,775 children move into permanent loving homes in fiscal year 2000, the period from October 1999-September 2000.

The fiscal year 2000 total was a 15 percent increase over FY 1999, when 2,417 state wards moved into adoptive homes.

"Through the combined efforts of the FIA and private adoption agencies (under contract to FIA), thousands of at-risk children have been placed in homes where they will receive the loving support they both need and deserve," said Engler. "As a result of successfully finalizing these adoptions, Michigan is eligible to receive a \$1.8 million incentive payment from the federal government."

The 2000 total represents children in adoptions finalized by a family court during the fiscal year. Before 1998, public agencies reported adoption placements during the year, or the number of children placed with families, some of which may not have been legally finalized.

"These are special needs children, often of minority birthright or heritage, who typically have secondary physical or mental health impairments," said FIA director Douglas E. Howard.

On average, Howard said they are older than the infants placed

in adoption by some private or international agencies. They are often members of sibling groups where adoption is recommended for more than one child.

The Family Independence Agency exclusively represents the interests of state wards—children

the federal government.

Pending Congressional approval, the funds will be allotted later in 2001 to be spent in the fiscal year beginning in October.

Michigan has received \$3 million for meeting federal adoption goals for 1998 and 1999. The FIA worked with parent groups and private agencies then used the funds to develop and enhance existing community-based post-adoption services around the state and fund continuing education programs for professionals and parents. "We plan

to continue using incentive funds to enhance post-adoption services in local communities," said Howard.

Under terms of the incentive program, states are paid a set amount based on each state ward adoption finalized after the state reaches a baseline requirement. Michigan exceeded their baseline total for fiscal 2000, therefore qualifying for the incentive payment.

The federal government created the incentive payment program as part of a national initiative to double the number of adoptions nationwide between 1996 and 2002.

"Input from adoptive families helped our agency decide what kind of services to fund with earlier incentive payments, and where to provide the services," said Howard. "This is an example of government collaboration with its customers to determine and meet their needs."



C F S News

CHILD and FAMILY SERVICES Administration

Adoption Finalizations in Michigan 1995-2000

Per Fiscal Year

2000:	2,775
1999:	2,417
1998:	2,233
1997:	2,378
1996:	2,189
1995:	1,860

Adoption "finalizations" were first reported in fiscal 1998. Previously, adoptive placements were reported.

who were removed from their birth home for abuse or neglect and whose parents have legally surrendered or otherwise lost their parental rights. The agency does not participate in private or international adoptions.

Because of its success in finalizing adoptions for state wards, Howard said Michigan is eligible to receive the incentive payment from



EBT expanded to 18 new counties

Cash assistance benefits delivered electronically in Kent, Midland and 16 other west and central Michigan counties

LANSING—FIA director Douglas E. Howard announced expanded use of Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) to public assistance and food stamps customers in 18 new counties: Clare, Clinton, Gladwin, Gratiot, Ionia, Isabella, Kent, Lake, Mason, Mecosta, Midland, Montcalm, Muskegon, Newaygo, Oceana, Osceola, Ottawa and Shiawassee.

Effective Feb. 1, assistance customers in those counties began accessing benefits using a plastic card called the Michigan Bridge Card to electronically obtain and expend their benefits. Cash benefits can be expended through enrolled retailers and obtained from automated teller machines, and food benefits can be redeemed at federally authorized food stamp retailers.

“Electronic Benefits Transfer is revolutionizing public assistance in Michigan,” said Howard Feb. 1. “It has succeeded at cutting costs and modernizing services for public assistance customers and Michigan businesses. In the next six months, EBT will end the use of food stamp coupons and deliver public assistance funds electronically everywhere in Michigan.”

The Family Independence Agency piloted EBT in Jackson County, the forerunner to statewide expansion. Beginning the first of every month through July, another group of counties will begin using Bridge cards for cash assistance customers until the process is statewide.

“Michigan had a successful pilot in Jackson County and that success has carried through in other counties where retailers and customers report relatively few problems

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with the transition,” said Howard, whose agency administers public assistance programs.

“Electronic Benefits Transfer provides greater privacy and dignity for public assistance customers. It means there are no welfare checks and no food stamp coupons, only the privacy of a business transaction that millions of other people take for granted with their credit and debit cards.”

Under EBT, cash assistance customers use their “Bridge card” — a product similar to an ATM or debit card — to purchase goods and obtain cash benefits at enrolled retailers or ATMs. Most retailers who previously accepted federal food stamps are enrolled as EBT retailers.

Each cardholder has separate electronic accounts for federal food stamps and cash assistance including Family Independence Program (FIP formerly AFDC) benefits. In November 2000 there were 34,888 food stamp cases in the 18 counties serving 78,965 persons. Also that month there were 8,365 FIP cases

serving 20,688 persons in those counties. Most FIP families also receive food stamps, meaning there is some duplication in the case numbers. The statewide Family Independence Program caseload total for December 2000 was 67,564.

Michigan contracted with Citicorp Services Inc., the leading national provider of Electronic Benefit Transfer services in the nation, to implement its program. They will maintain a 7-day, 24-hour customer service help line.

Customers will use the help line to report lost or stolen cards, select or change personal identification numbers, and to find stores that accept the Bridge card. In addition, EBT customers receive written training or can choose to attend video training on using their new card.

The FIA is the administrative entity for the federal Temporary Assistance to Needy Families and food stamps programs. It delivers those services through a network of 103 county, multi-county and Wayne County district offices.

With a little help from our friends in Berrien County

An effort to expose Zone 4 counties to different ideas and techniques to meet agency goals for the food stamp payment excellence

By Rita Riddle

Acting Zone 4 AP Specialist, Lansing

Telephone (517) 241-7568

Last Nov. 28 Berrien County Family Independence Agency hosted a site visit from Zone 3 and Zone 4 staff. I attended with county representatives: Bay County, Michael Haley; Ingham County, Cynthia Adado; Livingston County, Terri Brownell; Shiawassee County, Sadie Johnson; Monroe County, Mark Harmon; and Cass County, Carmen Szumski. Berrien County hosted the event because of their success in food stamp accuracy efforts.

Berrien has maintained a low food stamp payment misissuance rate for three years—4.42 percent in FY 1998, 3.84 percent in FY 1999 and 5.93 percent in FY 2000. Their current food stamp payment misissuance error rate is under the enhanced funding level of 6 percent.

The visiting family independence managers (FIM) were greeted by Berrien County FIA director Jerry Frank, deputy director Gwain McCree and FIM section managers Cherri Hickmon and Joan Wagner.

The county director discussed staff composition and the services provided by the office during a short orientation. Berrien County FIA has about 200 total staff, 79 family independence and eligibility specialists, 11 FIM and 3 information technology technicians at the Berrien County office. There are also about 15 FIS and ES staff and 2 FIM at the county's Niles branch office. Frank also discussed the demographics of the local community.

Next, the visitors attended the weekly FIM manager's meeting. All first and second line managers

attend the meeting including administrative support, fiscal, information technology, mailroom and accounting. Hickmon and Wagner chaired the meeting.

As part of their food stamp accuracy initiative, quality control audits and FIA 1099s are reviewed. When 1099s are received they are added to the spreadsheet and tracked for completion and follow-up. The FIM reviews the case for any errors; any errors are corrected, then the FIM and section manager review the case.

All FIM were asked to bring to a meeting their five most pressing concerns along with five solutions to the concerns. This was to recognize things we can change and identify things that can not be changed. One FIM did a time study and it is being reviewed to identify ways of working smarter not harder.

A full FIS caseload in Berrien County is 112-120 cases, with the range being 100-110 cases in Niles. When Berrien County hires a new family independence specialist, they are initially given 50 cases consisting of Family Independence Program (FIP) and child day care (CDC) cases or a one-half caseload. An eligibility specialist is given 100 cases. An assigned mentor observes their interviews and assists with



Berrien County managers contributing to their county's high accuracy rate (left to right top:) Berrien County FIA deputy director Gwain McCree and director Jerry Frank. Left to right bottom: FIM section managers Joan Wagner and Cherri Hickmon.

work. A newly hired employee cannot process work on their caseload or the mentors' and cannot link over to CIS without the mentor observing and initialing.

With new staff, FIM are requested to provide a training plan. For example, when new staff started in January, two Berrien FIM volunteered to provide most training. One FIM and a back up usually provide training. They train FIP policy, CDC, Food Stamps, Medical Assistance and State Emergency Relief. In food stamp training the FIM uses an actual case and give hands on instruction at the computer. Training is also provided for investigative interviewing. Sometimes FIM will train new hires from surrounding counties if time and space allows.

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Infant mortality subject of informational meeting

Five Wayne County districts offer information to local citizens

Project Zero coordinators in five Wayne County FIA district offices outside Detroit formed a coalition to address infant mortality.

The Western Wayne Coalition is conducting an outreach program to address the causes of early child death which include the lack of medical care for both the mother and infant, inadequate nutrition and poor parenting. Infant mortality occurs when an infant dies before reaching his or her first birthday.

“Early intervention, through proper medical care and prenatal care, helps prevent low birth weight and identifies conditions and behaviors that often cause or aggravate low birth weight such as smoking or drug and alcohol abuse,” said Linda Upshaw, Project Zero coordinator at the Wayne County Family Independence Agency Taylor District office.

The coalition sponsored its first informational session at the Wayne Community Center for customers whose offspring could be at risk. At this session health professionals from Oakwood Health Systems and representatives from Wayne County Community Coordinated Child Care Coordinating Council, DADS of Michigan, First Step, Western Wayne Child and Family Service and the Wayne County Health Department presented information to attendees.

Each participant received a new infant car seat and a “goodie” bag containing infant clothing and supplies. Transportation to and from the event was provided by Work First contractors. The five districts that form the coalition are Inkster, Lincoln Park, Redford, Romulus and Taylor. For more information contact Linda Upshaw at (734) 281-8329.

Inkster staff made a difference

Staff at the Inkster District helped Meek Milton Elementary School students do some gardening before the snow began falling.

Last Make a Difference Day—Oct. 28, 2000—Inkster District volunteers helped cultivate the soil and assisted students in planting tulip, daffodil and crocus bulbs at the school. One of the pre-kindergarten teachers wrote a grant and obtained 200 bulbs and a video on how to plant them. Make a Difference Day coincided with the school’s second annual math and science fair. Once a student completed an experiment during the fair, the students were given a bulb of their choice to plant in the garden. The District, with help from FIA Volunteer Services, provided the planting tools, extra bulbs, bone meal, potting soil and gloves.

The Inkster District has formed a partnership with the Meek Milton Elementary School, which houses pre-kindergarten through second grade, and in the past has assisted students with many projects. District volunteers for the bulb planting project were Maritha Allman, Catalina Benavides, Debra McMillan and Vanola Williams. For additional information contact Vanola Williams at (313) 724-5307.

New laws amend vendor program

Gov. Engler signed state legislation Jan. 11 affecting the Family Independence Agency’s rent vendor program. Public Acts 478 and 479 require a landlord or provider of housing participating in the FIA rent vendor program to meet building code requirements; and the FIA to terminate participation in program of landlords of housing with health and safety code violations. In addition, the bills revise the procedure for prioritizing housing inspections and require that building inspectors notify FIA of health or safety threatening code violations in housing of FIA program recipients. The bills have immediate effect.

With a little help from our friends

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Berrien County managers said teamwork is the key to maintaining a low food stamp payment misissuance rate. Over a long period of time, managers said they worked hard to form working relationships and get buy-in from all their managers in administrative support and assistance payments. Part of the plan is to include the managers in staff meetings, training programs and planning. In return, members of both divisions have the same understanding of goals. The administrative

support unit provides assistance in a number of important areas related to reports, audits and case logs.

To further build camaraderie, Berrien County hosted a two-day “State of the County” program where half their staff attend each day outside of the office. This provided staff with an overview of the local FIA’s accomplishments in 2000 and future directives. They hold numerous other activities designed to build alliances between workers in different parts of the county operation.

Employee involvement pays!

Quality Recognition System recipients recognized with \$1,000 and \$1,500 for their teamwork and successful efforts

By Stan Parker

FIA Office of Reengineering & Quality Management, Lansing
Telephone (517) 373-7984

The FIA values of meeting employee needs and teamwork, as well as employee commitment, customer focus and innovation, all come together in the Quality Recognition System.

On Jan. 31, the FIA, in partnership with the Michigan Office of Performance Excellence, presented a Quality Recognition System Award to a process improvement team from the Detroit Disability Determination Service (DDS). This team designed and implemented a plan that decentralizes physician coverage. Previously, all physicians were in one organizational unit. Now, physicians work as part of each disability examination team. This improvement resulted in a 6 percent increase in quality and accuracy. The overall quality rate for this office is now 98 percent.

During the event in Detroit, 11 staff and their sponsor, Otis Kern, the Detroit DDS office administrator, were honored with certificates and a \$1,000 recognition award from the Office of Performance Excellence.

This Detroit team received another Quality Recognition System award for redesigned management structure and development of core value that improved service to DDS internal customers. This process improvement team is committed to



Disability Determination Service award winners with their bounty (left to right front): Otis Kern, Mary Chisholm, Cassandra Collier, Linda Robinson, Patsy White, Wanda Whiting, Sandy Thomas-Ferguson and Stan Parker, FIA Office of Reengineering and Quality Management. Back row from left: Glen Squire, Wil Silvernail, Joselyn Lowrance, Willie Anderson and Brenda Edwards.



continuous process improvement.

Another FIA team received a Quality Recognition System Award of \$1,500. The Wayne County Hospital Corridor Medical District process improvement team earned the award by establishing a medical review team onsite at Detroit Receiving Hospital and streamlined their mailing system.

The Quality Recognition System is an employee recognition program administered by the Office



Office of Program Excellence staff (from left front): Karen Milner, Ellen Cooper and Loraé Bonneau. Back row from left: Nathaniel Lake, Holly Grandy-Miller and Dale Johnston.

of Performance Excellence, a joint venture between the Department of Civil Service and the Office of the State Employer. Office of Performance Excellence staff include Nathaniel Lake, a former FIA

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Quality awards

from page 14

employee, and Dale Johnston, who partners with FIA by providing Quality Recognition System training to our employees.

Each state department or agency has the responsibility to coordinate the QRS program within its department or agency. In the FIA, the Office of Reengineering and Quality Management provides leadership for the Quality Recognition System Award Program.

The initiative is one of five Family Independence Agency programs that recognize employee suggestions, contributions and ideas for improvements and process improvements that are implemented. In total, the FIA employee program includes Quick Hits, T.E.A.M. Award, Quality Recognition System, Years of Service and the Employee Recognition Award program.

The FIA Office of Human Resources administers the Service Award program—that recognizes employees for years of service—while FIA Office of Communications provides leadership for Employee Recognition Awards—awards given annually to a representative sample of FIA workers nominated by their peers for outstanding achievement and community participation. The Office of Reengineering and Quality Management administers the remaining three programs.

■ If you are interested in process improvement and want to join the Detroit DDS and Wayne County Hospital Corridor Medical District teams in being recognized for process improvement, contact Stan Parker, Quality Recognition System coordinator, by telephone at (517) 373-7984 or email parkers@state.mi.us

These programs reflect Critical Success Factor No. 2 in the FIA 2001 Strategic Plan—to “attract, develop and retain high quality employees”.

FIA people

FIA director **Douglas E. Howard** announced the appointment of **Janice Watkins** as director of the Ingham County Family Independence Agency. The appointment will be effective February 18. “Janice Watkins brings a wealth of agency experience to this position, along with considerable community involvement,” said FIA director Douglas Howard. Watkins, an FIA employee for 27 years, was most recently a social services division administrator at the Kalamazoo County FIA, where she also served as acting director. She has experience as a social services program manager, an eligibility and family independence specialist supervisor, quality program analyst and specialist, and assistance payments worker. Watkins earned a bachelor’s degree in social work and a master’s degree in public administration from Western Michigan University. Watkins, a resident of Three Rivers, is married and has a son who is a freshman at Northern Michigan University.

Edward Ayoub, manager of the Wayne County Family Independence Agency Magnolia-Boulevard District Office, died unexpectedly on Jan. 11.



Edward Ayoub

Mr. Ayoub had been in ill health for some years and was hospitalized for several days prior to his death, but he worked in the office as recently as Friday, Jan. 5. Mr. Ayoub was 47. Funeral services were held Jan. 13 at St. Mary’s Antiochian Orthodox Church in Livonia.

Robert Adams was appointed director of both Arenac and Gladwin county FIA offices effective Jan. 7. “Robert Adams has been director of Gladwin County since 1986,” said director Howard. “Adding Arenac County to his responsibilities enables him to use staff in a more efficient way while continuing to provide excellent service to our customers in both counties.” Adams replaced **William Thorp**, who retired as Arenac County director in April 2000. He is the 25th dual county director in the FIA network. Both county offices will remain in their current facilities with no employee displacement. The joint operation may provide opportunities for specialization and may create management efficiencies between the two counties. As director of the two counties, Adams, a Boston marathon runner, denies he will use the marathon-like distance between Gladwin and Standish office for training purposes saying, “I’d be too tired to work once I got there.”



Robert Adams

FIA director Howard announced the appointment of **Peggy Tiemann** as actor director of Livingston County FIA, effective Feb. 1. She replaces **David Fitzgerald**, who retired. Tiemann, who holds a master’s degree in guidance and counseling from Wayne State University in Detroit, was most recently services program manager at Oakland County FIA.

Former FIA employee **Ted Haworth** was honored in December as Michigan’s “Independent Living Champion for 2000” by the Michigan Association of Centers for Independent Living. A former Family Independence Agency employee, Haworth is independent living program coordinator with Michigan Rehabilitation Services, a division of the Michigan Department of Career Development.

Ceremony caps big autumn season in Lapeer County

Diana Oland, mother of twins and former public assistance recipient, is Achiever of the Month for November 2000

By Sue Griffith, Family Independence Manager
Lapeer County Family Independence Agency
Telephone (810) 667-0836

LAPEER—Lapeer County was host to two big events in the fall of 2000—our Project Zero kickoff was held in October and we hosted an Achiever of the Month ceremony on Nov. 30. Although both events involved a lot of time, effort and coordination with FIA Central Office, it was really worth it.

The personal experiences revealed at these events from people who have needed FIA assistance and been successful in getting beyond their barriers made FIA, Work First staff, and others instrumental in their success feel proud and rejuvenated.

On Nov. 30 Family Independence Agency director Douglas E. Howard visited our office to present Diana Oland the FIA's 84th Achiever of the Month award.

"The Achiever of the Month program celebrates the challenges along the way as well as the destination," said Howard. "This month I have the privilege of recognizing Diana Oland for her motivation and determination to become independent from the welfare system."

But family independence is more than an FIA issue, Howard said.

"It takes the efforts of a lot of you to make welfare-to-work happen," said Howard. "The partnerships that we forge with communities and employers are crucial in helping people gain employment and self-sufficiency."

"Today we are here to salute Diana Oland, but I want you to know that this honor also reflects very favorably on the Lapeer County Family Independence Agency staff, who have made significant contribu-



Diana Oland

tions to her success."

Howard named other partners who helped Diana and welfare-to-work succeed.

"There have also been many other people, doing a number of small or large tasks, that have helped to clear the way for her to succeed. I am pleased to have this opportunity to thank the Lapeer County FIA, the Thumb Area Michigan Works!, Wendy's and the many family and friends who have contributed to her success."

Diana had lots of challenges in her life, but was able to formulate a goal and achieve it. She came to the Family Independence Agency in October 1992 when she was single, unemployed, and pregnant. The then-Department of Social Services provided Aid for Dependent Children (now Family Independence Program) benefits, Food Stamps and Medicaid assistance, which were helpful to Diana during this period until her twin daughters—Catrina and Kara, now age 7—were born in February 1993.

Diana and the twins' father

were married in October 1993 but due to her husband's medical problems they were not able to be independent of public assistance at that time. Diana worked at various jobs over the next few years, but at minimal earnings. She and her husband were separated at different times and life was not going smoothly for her and her girls.

Diana told persons at the achiever ceremony about a visit to the Lapeer County FIA office when she mentioned to her MOST worker that she would like to go to college so she could get a better job.

Frances Trotman, the MOST worker who is now a supervisor at Tuscola County FIA, picked up the phone and called the Detroit College of Business (now Davenport University). She handed the phone to Diana and told her to find out about going right now.

Diana remembers that experience as one of the moments when FIA really made a difference in her life. During the ceremony she publicly thanked the staff at Davenport for all of their support and understanding. While she attended school the MOST program assisted her with day care and gas mileage. The Thumb Area Michigan Works helped with car repairs, mileage and provided educational support.

While Diana was attending college, her husband's health and their marriage continued to deteriorate. There were some days that she didn't think she could make it to school and work, but the counselors at Davenport helped her realize she could.

Her husband died in 1997. As a result, the girls became eligible for Social Security benefits. Because of this and Diana's earnings, her Family Independence Program case was closed in winter 1997. She continued to receive Transitional Medicaid and child day care assistance. Diana graduated from Davenport College with honors in June 1998 with an associate's degree in business administration.

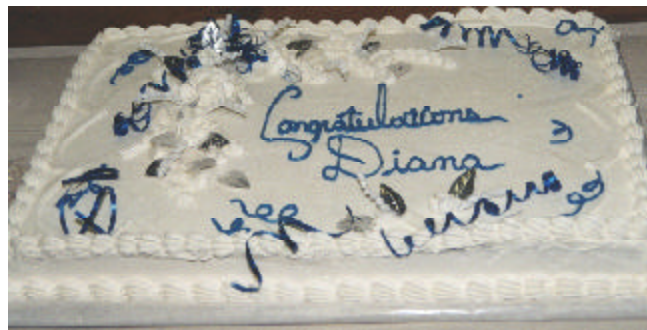
Diana worked at various jobs while she attended college. She began her employment at Wendy's in Lapeer in August 1996. Diana was named Wendy's "Employee of the Month" in February 1997 and was later chosen "Employee of the Year". When she obtained her associate's degree she was promoted to a management position.

During the Nov. 30 ceremony, Diana thanked her Work First counselor, Scott Beattie, and Linda Wheeler, her family independence specialist with Lapeer County FIA, for all their support throughout her years of working and going to school.

Wheeler said: "Diana is extremely focused and always stays

on track. She made the Dean's list in college every year. She has integrity and lots of confidence. I never doubted that she would reach her goals."

All of the staff from the agencies who worked with Diana said she had remarkable determina-



Diana's cake and her family's happy faces say it all for her achievements on the day of her special event.



tion and perseverance, but Diana maintained that the support she received made all the difference in her being successful. Today, Diana receives only Medicaid assistance for her twins.

Her new husband and their one-month old daughter accompanied

Diana at the achiever ceremony. Her twins were not at the ceremony because they were in school and working toward perfect attendance. Everyone was happy for Diana's new chance for a supportive family life, and wished her continued success in obtaining a brighter future.

"Achieving is what our agency is all about—people overcoming barriers or personal problems that interfere with their ability to succeed," said Howard.

"Because you have shown such determination and motivation in the face of many challenges as you have worked to free your family from reliance on public assistance, it is with great pleasure that I present the November 2000 Achiever of the Month Award to Diana Oland.

"Today, Diana is on a path to a brighter future. She is a wonderful role model for her children, who through her example will learn that determination and hard work can lead to success."

Congratulations Diana!

• • •

■ The statewide Achiever of the Month Award was established in October 1993 to recognize the contributions and achievements of those who participate in Michigan's landmark reform initiative, *To Strengthen Michigan Families*. For more information contact Janice Berry at the Family Independence Agency Office of Communications by telephone at (517) 373-0394 or email to BerryJ2@state.mi.us



Commission for the Blind in national spotlight

Lansing-based employee selected to introduce former president in visit to Flint

By Karla Hudson, Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor
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Telephone (517) 335-2930

My dream is that someday technology will be universally designed and accessible out of the box without needing expensive aftermarket modifications. This concept of universal design and technology accessibility was one of the many ideals I was honored to present for Michigan Commission for the Blind (MCB) last Sept. 21, when I introduced then-President Clinton.

The event had more than 1,000 guests and was held at the "Digital Divide" in Flint. The venue was a joint meeting place of the Flint Disability Network and Mott Community College. Clinton's visit outlined important new steps aimed at bridging the "digital divide" for persons with disabilities.

The digital divide refers to an emerging gap where many individuals, especially those with disabilities, often lack access to the recent technology boom. There are contemporary dynamics that block persons with disabilities from full inclusion in the technology age. These difficulties include financial access, access to training, and the need for wider universal design where contemporary products are designed for use by everyone, including persons with disabilities, without special aftermarket modifications.

Many of today's inaccessible products could easily have been made accessible had engineers and designers employed concepts of universal design in the design phase of product creation. Most people don't design inaccessible web content and soft-



Karla Hudson with former President Bill Clinton at the "Digital Divide" last September.

ware on purpose, they simply don't understand the issues. Web and software designers can use relatively simple efforts to affect huge improvements in content usability for persons with disabilities.

Another speaker at the event, Judy Brewer of the Web Accessibility Initiative, cited work her agency has undertaken including a set of web accessibility standards. These standards provide web authors with guidance for making content accessible by persons with disabilities.

The former president reflected on occurrences in his administration that created opportunities to reduce the technology gap for persons with disabilities. In the 1996 federal Telecommunications Act, advocates worked to break down barriers by ensuring that persons with disabilities have full access to telephone equipment and service allowing for improved independence.

Clinton said the 1998 Workforce Investment Act supports the integration of individuals with disabilities into the communities where they live and work. The Work Incentives Improvement Act, he said, allows individuals to retain their Medicaid or Medicare while working. Michigan Commission for the Blind actively pursues outcomes relative to technology and works to serve as a model for public and private employers striving to develop more inclusive work environments. Staff members of the MCB know recent economic growth is linked to technology-related occupations. Clinton's visit underscored the importance

of technology and vocational efforts by MCB that enable greater participation by persons who are blind in this emerging technical workforce.

The White House selected me for the duty at the recommendation of MCB director Patrick Cannon and Mike Zelley, director of the Flint-based Disability Network. I was shocked to receive a late evening phone message from the White House and had to play the message twice to believe it was not a prank. I fondly recall the day filled with numerous interactions with White House staff working vigorously to finalize all arrangements by 11 p. m. the night before the president's arrival. This was a great personal honor for me and for MCB. I thoroughly enjoyed the experience and was delighted to play a role focusing attention on the importance of technology access for persons with disabilities.

An “attitude of gratitude” in Adrian

Event at FIA training school brings new dimension for female residents

By Helen Hendricks, Group Leader

Adrian Training School

Telephone (517) 264-1214

ADRIAN, Mich.—The female students at Adrian Training School have a lot for which to be grateful. As recipients of Byrne Memorial funds, the last year has been full of new experiences and treatment strategies designed to develop a gender-specific substance abuse/recovery program. In recognition of the first year of funding, a campus-wide celebration was held to demonstrate that you can “party sober”. The day-long party was a collaborative effort between Adrian Training School personnel, the recently formed Family Advisory Board, the Citizen’s Action Advisory Committee, community and staff volunteers.

Entitled “Attitude of Gratitude”, the celebration was held last September on the school grounds. An activity leading up to the event was a T-shirt design contest. Students submitted designs expressing gratitude to staff for their efforts in the students’ recovery. These shirts were then distributed to all staff.

The month prior to the celebration students could earn tokens for any substance abuse or recovery activity in which they participated. They could earn additional tokens on the day of the event by correctly answering substance abuse/recovery questions at the “swami table”. Tickets were turned in at the end of the day for prizes. There was also a poster contest



The dunk tank was a popular activity at Adrian Training School’s “attitude of gratitude” celebration.

between living units that were displayed and judged on the day of the event.

Residents’ families were invited to the party, which included a velcro wall, bouncy boxing, a moonwalk, duck pond and sumo wrestling. One of the most popular activities was the dunk tank, in which several brave Adrian Training School employees gave students an opportu-

nity to light-heartedly get back at staff. And, of course, no celebration would be complete without food, food and more food! Pizza, subs and nachos were served all day in the picnic pavilion. Participants could take trolley rides around campus the whole day.

The “Attitude of Gratitude” was a great success

and provided students with many opportunities to give thanks, learn more about substance abuse and recovery and just plain have fun without the use of alcohol or other drugs.

■ Adrian Training School is an FIA-administered juvenile justice facility located in the Lenawee County seat. It serves up to 120 adjudicated felons with capacity for 60 men and 60 women.

Free depression and alcohol self-test available

Feeling depressed? One way to help decide is to call 1-800-887-5676 toll-free to take a free, anonymous, four-minute screening for depression. This screening is available in English and in Spanish. Screening for alcohol problems, which often coexist with depression, is also available when you call this number. You will receive immediate results, which you can use to help you decide if you would benefit from a professional evaluation and possible treatment. If you have further questions about this screening, or about either alcohol or depression, you may contact the Employee Service Program in Lansing, by calling (517) 373-7630 or toll-free (800) 521-1377; in Detroit call (313) 256-3619 or toll-free (800) 872-5563.

Home heating fund doubled since last year

With a recent \$27 million award from the federal government, Michigan has twice as much to spend this year to help qualifying residents get through the cold months of winter.

“With the very cold winter and energy prices climbing, this is great news for Michigan citizens,” said FIA director Douglas E. Howard, who made the announcement Jan. 31.

The U. S. Department of Health and Human Services notified the Family Independence Agency in December of the additional award, bringing to \$132 million the total budget for the state’s Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program budget for fiscal year 2001.

In fiscal year 2000, Michigan received \$64 million for low-income heating assistance. Last year, the federal funds provided 325,000 households with low-income heating assistance, including Home Heating Tax Credit beneficiaries, a program available through Michigan Department of Treasury.

“With the increased federal funds we will be able to help more people during the most difficult months of the year,” said Howard, whose agency administers the State Emergency Relief program. “This program pays for basic heating and crisis needs for low-income families.”

Because of the increased funds, the FIA recently increased the home heating ceiling amount it will provide for qualifying citizens under SER. From February through September, qualifying citizens may receive annual assistance of up to \$350 for natural gas and wood, \$650 for other delivered fuels except wood, \$350 for residential electric and \$700 for all electric home assistance.

In order to qualify for SER, a family must meet certain household income requirements. Families should apply through their local Family Independence Agency office.

Family Independence Agency
Office of Communications
P O Box 30037
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The Family Independence Agency will not discriminate against any individual or group because of race, sex, religion, age, height, weight, national origin, color, height, weight marital status, political beliefs or disability. If you need help with reading, writing, hearing, etc., under the Americans with Disabilities Act, you are invited to make your needs known to an FIA Office in your county.